

American Catholics ambivalent about pope

With the recent visit of Pope John Paul II to the United States, the issue of the obedience of American Catholics to church doctrine has arisen again.



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Catholics in the United States have long admired the pontiff as a spiritual figure yet disagreed with many of the teachings he proclaims.

Despite the popularity of his personality, many Catholics, especially those across the Atlantic, consider themselves faithful members of the church while openly disagreeing with church teachings on moral and theological issues such as artificial contraception, abortion and the exclusively male, celibate priesthood.

The dichotomy between the United States and Rome has always been wide, and recent events show no signs of bringing them closer together.

A recent Time/CNN poll shows that 70 percent of U.S. Catholics think that priests ought to be allowed to marry.

Sixty percent favor allowing women to be ordained as priests. Sixty-nine percent favor allowing divorced Catholics to marry within the church.

With so much dissent within the church, one might wonder how John Paul II enjoys such overwhelming popularity and respect.

How can he effectively shepherd a flock that continues to stray?

The answer lies in the fact that it is impossible to classify the current pope as a liberal or conserv-

ative in terms of the way we as Americans use the terms.

Sure, he's the biggest promoter of conservative ideas such as "family values" and the staunchest opponent of the "culture of death" fostered by legal abortion and euthanasia.

But unlike Pat Robertson or Pat Buchanan, the pope cannot be described as a member of the religious right.

In fact, the teachings of the pope include some of the most liberal ideas you could think of.

He has written and spoken strongly in favor of helping the poor and the oppressed.

While the church has no official position on American political issues such as the Contract with America or the Republican revolution, the pope has cautioned against reforms which might cause the poor to suffer.

He has condemned the use of the death penalty. He has opposed limits on immigration as an af-

front to human freedom.

The pope cannot be pinned down along strict ideological lines.

The overriding themes of his teachings revolve around respect and dignity of human life independent of their place on the political spectrum.

Catholics see the pope as more of a spiritual leader and father figure than as a moral disciplinarian.

That is why he draws enthusiastic and admiring crowds in excess of 100,000 people despite the widespread disagreement among American Catholics with church teaching.

Yet, the most telling statistic is that 80 percent of Catholics in the United States believe it is possible to disagree with the pope on official positions on morality and still be a "good" Catholic.

This indicates that Catholics take pride in their faith and want to remain in communion with the church.

It also indicates, however, that Americans view

the dictates of their own consciences as a higher authority than church doctrine.

Americans are especially resentful of being told they are wrong. While they want to be Catholic, they don't want to accept church doctrine that restricts their freedom to live as they please.

Much of the disobedience stems from America's lack of respect for moral authority.

Many simply refuse to examine their moral views in light of the teachings of the church because they don't want to sacrifice their freedom.

The disagreement itself is not bad. On the contrary, controversy is good because it challenges thinking people to articulate and examine what they believe.

Challenging what you believe is the best way to understand it better.

Americans who take pride in their Catholicism yet disagree with Church teachings are not necessarily rebuking the authority of the Church.

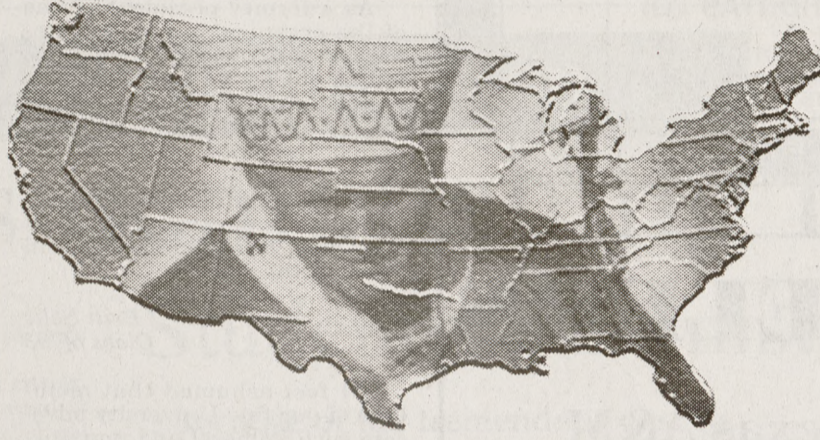
They may have legitimate, intellectually valid concerns that deserve to be discussed.

The church should not, and generally does not, discourage the intellectual freedom of its members. Individuals who disagree with a moral or theological teaching of the church in good conscience have a right and an obligation to dissent.

This does not give individuals license to believe anything they want.

It means they must make their own intellectually honest decisions, but not necessarily intellectually lazy ones.

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Million will march with good reason

Although it excludes women, Farrakhan's 'March' is for a greater good

On Oct. 16, more than a million African-Americans are expected to converge on the steps of our nation's capital.



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However, this presence will be largely devoid of African-American women.

This is not surprising, as the originator of this "Million Man March" is Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan.

The Nation of Islam, which has been criticized for its view that women are in some ways inferior to men, has met opposition over its decision to exclude women from the march.

The national chapter of the NAACP has refused to support the Million Man March because of this and other reasons.

This march could easily be overshadowed by Farrakhan's involvement. The controversial Farrakhan has been criticized for spreading anti-Semitic messages and advocating reverse racism in the past.

But those who oppose this march because it excludes women or because Farrakhan is the originator should — just this once — look the other way.

The Million Man March is a good idea. Farrakhan is an intelligent man. Although some of his philosophies may be a bit askew, his intentions behind the march are honorable.

Farrakhan recognizes the need to "show the world a vastly different picture of the black male."

As an Associated Press story stated, "The state of America's black men is measured with sweeping statistics — too few in the classrooms and board rooms, too many on the streets, behind prison walls and in early graves."

Farrakhan has realized that the hero or role model African-American males need is

within themselves, and no one can change their reality except themselves.

By congregating in front of the nation's capital and the eyes of the world, African-American males can draw attention to the positive and redeeming qualities that exist within themselves.

While this may seem like a step backward for women's rights, the march's opposition should look at all of the positions that could come of it.

It is not likely that the state of equality for women will regress back to the dark ages over this event, as some feminist groups and the NAACP claim.

Conversely, concentrating on the African-American male, or specifically the African-American father, could possibly strengthen the family unit.

In other words, the benefits of the Million Man March will, in a sense, trickle down to African-American women and children.

And while it is true that no women are allowed to take part in the actual march, many women have taken part in organizing it.

Farrakhan likens it to the alphabet: women can participate from A to Y, but Z, the actual march, is reserved for the African-American male.

Cheez Washington, president of the Texas A&M chapter of the NAACP, said the main reason the actual march excludes women is that in the past, African-American women have been pushed into the role as the leader of the family and the community.

"The march is a chance for the African-American male to stand up and say, 'I want to be a leader like I should. I want to be the father of my child like I should. Let me stand on my own,'" he said.

Tina Harrison, chairwoman of the Black Awareness Committee at Texas A&M said she does not mind that the actual march in Washington excludes women.

"The march will benefit women by making our black men to be better fathers ... better leaders," she said.

Harrison says the march is the African-American male's chance to "take back his community."

Black men have been misrepresented for so long that the march gives them a chance to combat the negative stereotypes that haunt them, she said.

There will be those that criticize this march because it is an African-American event — white people are not allowed to participate.

However, white Americans should not get the wrong idea.

Those who oppose the march because it excludes women should — just this once — look the other way.

Upon analyzing the reasons and motivations behind this march, it becomes evident that white America could do little to help but stand back and respect African-Americans' right to march and their cause to do so.

Even Ted Koppel, host of *Night Line* had concerns about the march when he asked, "What would people think if David Duke organized such a march that only white men could attend?"

Although, it is a legitimate concern, white Americans such as Duke, can't cite the same statistics about their race that plague African-Americans.

As the Associated Press story testifies, "Thousands more black men are serving time in prison or jail than studying in college ... one-third of black men in their 20s are either in jail or prison, or on parole or probation."

For African Americans it is a time for a change, and if this march excludes women and whites, but has a much-needed positive effect on the African-American community, then so be it.

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EDITORIAL

SKIN DEEP

All students should make an effort to see the film focusing on racism.

Racism confronts campuses from coast to coast, and unfortunately, the cozy confines of A&M are certainly not immune. However, positive steps are being taken on this campus to combat racial discrimination.

Thursday night's screening of *Skin Deep*, which was shown to a packed Rudder Theater, addressed the tension and conflicting views involved in race relations among college students.

Unlike efforts of the past, which addressed racial barriers by examining solutions proposed by administrators, policy makers and multicultural experts, *Skin Deep* looks at the problems and possible solutions through the points-of-view of those directly involved — the students.

Four A&M students are in the film and were available for questions after the screening of the film. The students expressed excitement and enthusiasm about the vast amount of knowledge they received from this experience.

The A&M students further related that the experience was enlightening and recommended that every student participate in similar programs to gain an understanding of different cultural viewpoints.

Unfortunately, time and monetary limitations restrict many students from participating in such a hands-on program. Also, some students would not participate in such programs because many are not comfortable about openly discussing their attitudes regarding racial topics.

Hopefully, this film will reach a wide audience and bring about new ideas and perspectives to all students, regardless of their racial views.

The rewards of discussing the concerns and issues addressed in the film are obvious. As A&M grows in size, the number of minority students will surely increase.

Students will better be able to relate to one another through understanding and compassion for others.

But first we all must realize that the problem is not just skin deep.



MAIL CALL

Scholarship cuts hit close to home

I never cease to laugh cynically at claims, such as Lydia Percival's on Oct. 9, that Republicans are not cutting student aid.

My scholarship of \$5000 was eliminated by an act of Congress on July 27, 1995.

I study very hard, have an excellent GPR and was awarded a scholarship because I am studying to be a teacher. The cancellation of my scholarship is especially tragic as teaching is a profession already sadly lacking in monetary rewards.

I have worked extremely hard my entire life in order to be able to support my education through scholarships.

Now I am thrust out on my own again because the govern-

ment doesn't think that my hard work or my profession is important enough for a scholarship.

It is a tragedy to think we as a society no longer value honesty and hard work. The truth is that scholarships are being cut, and I am living proof. No one has the right to say it isn't happening.

*Scott Wieding
Class of '96*

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